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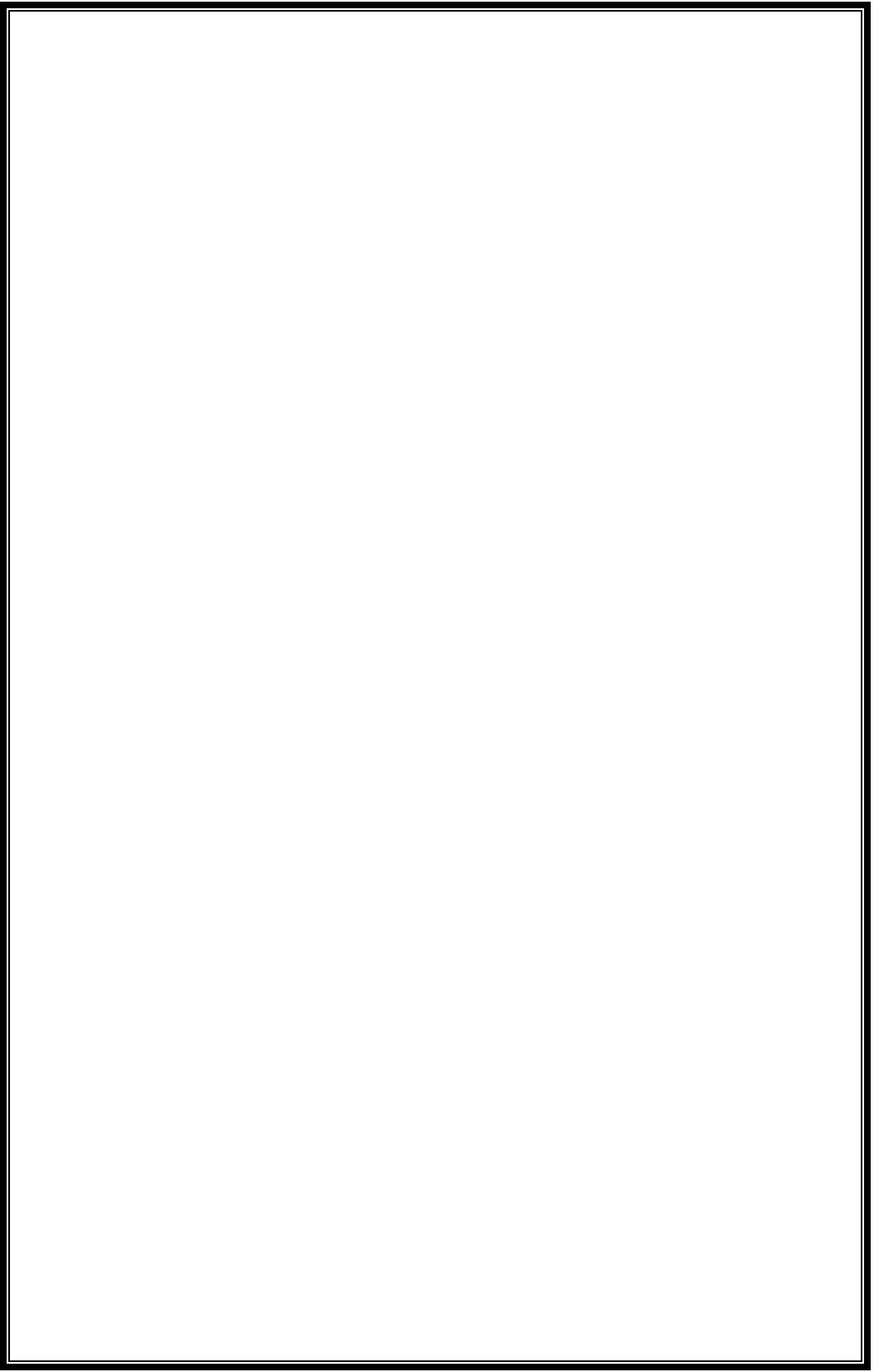
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THE OLDEST GREENHORN

By Larry W. Jones – Kingwood Kowboy

A Greenhorn Wrangler's Account Of the 2012 Sombrero Ranches 40th Annual "**Great American Horse Drive**" when 800 head of half-wild horses were driven 62 miles in two days, from Browns Park Winter Pastures in far NW Colorado to the Big Gulch Ranch at Craig Colorado on May 5 – 6, 2012

Introduction:

The transformation from work-a-day, or more correctly, work-a-night person in the big city to a Colorado greenhorn wrangler occurred over a period of about six years, 2006 - 2012.

Being born and raised in Texas, my roots sprouted from the poor country soil of Conroe, a small town just north of Houston. Along with my twin brother Jerry, our older brother Paul, and sister Daisy, we were brought up to be honest, hard workers by our exceptional and loving mother, Bettie, as she had already done for Roxie and Evie who were already out of the nest and married.

At the age of twenty three I married the Austrian beauty Lydia Evelyn Walters. On February 17, 2012 we celebrated our 44th wedding anniversary, having raised three wonderful children, Stephanie, Jonathan and Tiffany.

After working fifteen years for Delta Airlines as an aircraft mechanic and avionics technician, we moved to the Winter ski and Summer resort town of Red River, New Mexico for four years from July 1982 – July 1986. Lydia and I never worked such long and hard hours and days as we did during those years. We returned to Texas and I went to work for Continental Airlines as aircraft mechanic, avionics technician and ending with the last nineteen years in Maintenance Control at the downtown Houston headquarters.

Retiring at the end of November 2008 with 22 ½ years at Continental Airlines, thoughts began to form about changing locations. We had lived in Kingwood Texas, 30 miles north of Houston, for close to twenty years.

The heat and humidity of the long Texas Summers was getting unbearable. The cool, dry mountain air of Colorado beckoned, where Stephanie, son-in-law Doyle, and grandson Brogan were living in Longmont, located just North of Denver and twenty minutes from Boulder. On May 2, 2011 we arrived in Longmont and settled into our new Fox Ridge ground floor apartment facing the beautiful mountains.

As mentioned at the beginning, my transformation into a greenhorn wrangler started about six years prior to the 2012 Great American Horse Drive. On Nov 21, 2006 I began writing classic and vintage style Country, Cowboy and Western song lyrics, the first being titled "This Heart Of Mine". To date, more than 2,500 song lyrics have been authored under the "Real Country Lyrics" series, an ongoing and enjoyable hobby of mine.

Prior to retirement in 2008, Lydia noticed that my wardrobe was slowly but surely changing. Dress shoes began to be replaced with dress cowboy boots, dress pants with tailored western pants, dress shirts with button-down western shirts, Levis and Wrangler boot-cut jeans, and an assortment of cowboy hats and western belts.

When we moved to Longmont Colorado, I noticed that there seemed to be many more authentic cowboys as well as city cowboys and cowgirls than we had seen in metropolitan Texas. I had the feeling that my transformation was timely to say the least. I felt comfortable and at home right away, living in Cowboy Country.

One day Lydia and I were watching the local Longmont TV station which was airing a documentary on the Sombrero Ranches Great American Horse Drive which takes place yearly from the Winter pastures of Browns Park Colorado, near the Utah/Wyoming borders, to the Sombrero Ranch located ten miles west of Craig Colorado.

Typically, around 800 horses are rounded up and driven 62 miles in two days. The first day of the horse drive covers 30 miles and ends on the west side of Maybell Colorado. On the second day, the horses are driven through the main street of Maybell and on through prairie and sage brush open space and Colorado Hwy 40 for 32 miles to the Big Gulch Ranch west of Craig.

After viewing the documentary, I knew I had to be a part of the 40th annual Great American Horse Drive. Since the Sombrero Ranches main office is located in Longmont, I met with Lee Peters, coordinator of the horse drive. He furnished many helpful details that are not found on the internet website.

I also drove the short distance to the Sombrero Ranches horse stables on Niwot Road to meet Mark Bishop who played a wrangler in the movie "Cowboys and Aliens". Mark put me in touch with Christy Cramer, horsemanship trainer at East Slope Farms of the Rockies on Nelson Road in Longmont. With her professional horse training, I knew I would be a rootin' tootin' greenhorn wrangler in the 40th annual Sombrero Ranches Great American Horse Drive.

The Oldest Greenhorn (Larry W. Jones 05/16/2012) (song#6584)

He was the oldest greenhorn on the drive
Cowboys wondered if he would end alive
He wanted to be a wrangler at sixty eight
And it was sixty miles from gate to gate

Winter pastures were never known as mild
And all the horses there were now half wild
Colorado would teach that greenhorn well
And time would tell if he reached old Maybell

He saddled up along with all the rest
And the best knew that this would be his test
The greenhorn started out with little trust
Riding drag and eating a lot of dust

His horse was a mighty big Belgian draft
The head wrangler had helped to pick him out
At the Yampa, the greenhorn's bones were sore
The first day's drive was twenty five miles more

They reached the turn-out pasture late that day
And the greenhorn showed he had the will to stay
His Belgian draft became part of the herd
Next day's horse was unlike the greenhorn's first

He rode through Maybell toward the Big Gulch Ranch
On a fiery red quarterhorse that pranced
The greenhorn held on with nothing more than hope
Riding drag and flank on the western slope

Sixty miles is a long, long old horse drive
He finished his ride with a new found pride
He wanted to be a wrangler at sixty eight
He was the oldest greenhorn gate to gate

He wanted to be a wrangler at sixty eight
He was the oldest greenhorn gate to gate



All wranglers who completed the sixty two mile, two day Gate-to-Gate horse drive from Browns Park to the Big Gulch Ranch were awarded this trophy belt buckle. Each year the buckle is redesigned so that it is distinct from the others. The design is hand engraved and made from nickel silver. It measures 4.5 X 3.5 inches.

Hosts and Sombrero Ranches Staff

Rex Walker – Boulder CO
Queeda Walker – Boulder CO
Cody Walker – Estes Park CO
Kathy Walker – Estes Park CO
Justin Walker – Monterey TN
Zack Walker – Monterey TN
Donald Broom – Craig CO
Bryan “Kansas” Seck – Estes Park CO
Jason Broom – Maybell CO
Jim Pierce – Tucson AZ
Lee Peters – Longmont CO
Christy Cramer – Lyons CO
Ed Pinkard – Longmont CO
Terry Humphrey – Boulder CO
Johnny Garcia – Mesa AZ
Jason Norman – Erie CO
Carla Garcia – Mesa AZ and Canada
Brenda Mullins – Erie CO
Chuck Hummel – Longmont CO
Mark Ogden – Redding CA
Mark Bishop – Niwot CO
Terry Gerhardt – Redding CA
Freda Bishop – Niwot CO
Kent Caldwell – Longmont CO
Bud Walsh – Berthoud CO
Carlos de la Cruz – Longmont CO
Jodi Walsh – Berthoud CO
Carrie Sykes – Craig CO
Wes Te Winkle – Estes Park CO
Cara Jensen – Montrose CO
Kristyn Smith – Estes Park CO
Alex Christopherson – UT
Ken Richmond – NM
Jesse Christopherson – UT
Roger Hamilton – NM

Guest Riders

Nick Davic – Pittsburgh PA
 Pamela Bozorgui – Nottingham PA
 Vanessa Briggs – Westminster CO
 Chuck Brix – Plantation FL
 Laurie Cleveland – Queen Creek AZ
 Lexie Courtney – Calgary Canada
 Kristen Des Marais – CO
 John Edwards – Danielsville PA
 Stanton Faitz – Algonquin IL
 Jeff Arnold – Pittsburg PA
 Tanya Ferraro – Welland Ontario Canada
 Donna Doyle – Chesterfield VA
 Florence Gaia – Durango CO
 Mary Anne Broderick – Pittsburgh PA
 Lynn Goble – Redding CA
 Sarah Hallam – Donington Derby UK
 Richard Hearting – Collyer KS
 Debbie Thomas – Manakin-Sabot VA
 Judy McCarty – Franktown CO
 Bertie LaChance – Imnama OR
 Linda McKey – Utica NY
 Lorie Myers – Danielsville PA
 Dennis Neitzel – Midlothian TX
 John Newell – Centennial CO
 Andrew Nudd – Donington Derby UK
 Shawndell Oliver – Denver CO
 Stan Pentecost – Denver CO
 Margaret Poirer – Denver CO
 Kenneth Riggs – Key West FL
 Sue Radford – Enterprize OR
 CJ Rigielsky – Lafayette CO
 Bengt Sandin – Linkoping Sweden
 Virginia Schlueter – New Orleans LA
 Julie Semenuk – Ridgeway ON Canada
 Lynda Griem – Port Erie, ON Canada
 Margie Tellam – Chandler AZ
 Lance Vanover – Houston TX
 Matthew Patten – Pittsburgh PA
 Terry Mylan – Pittsburgh PA
 Shara Rutberg – Boulder CO
 Larry W Jones – Longmont CO
 Mary Ann Broderick – Pittsburgh PA
 Lance Goble – Redding CA
 Savannah Goble – Redding CA

History Of Sombrero Ranches

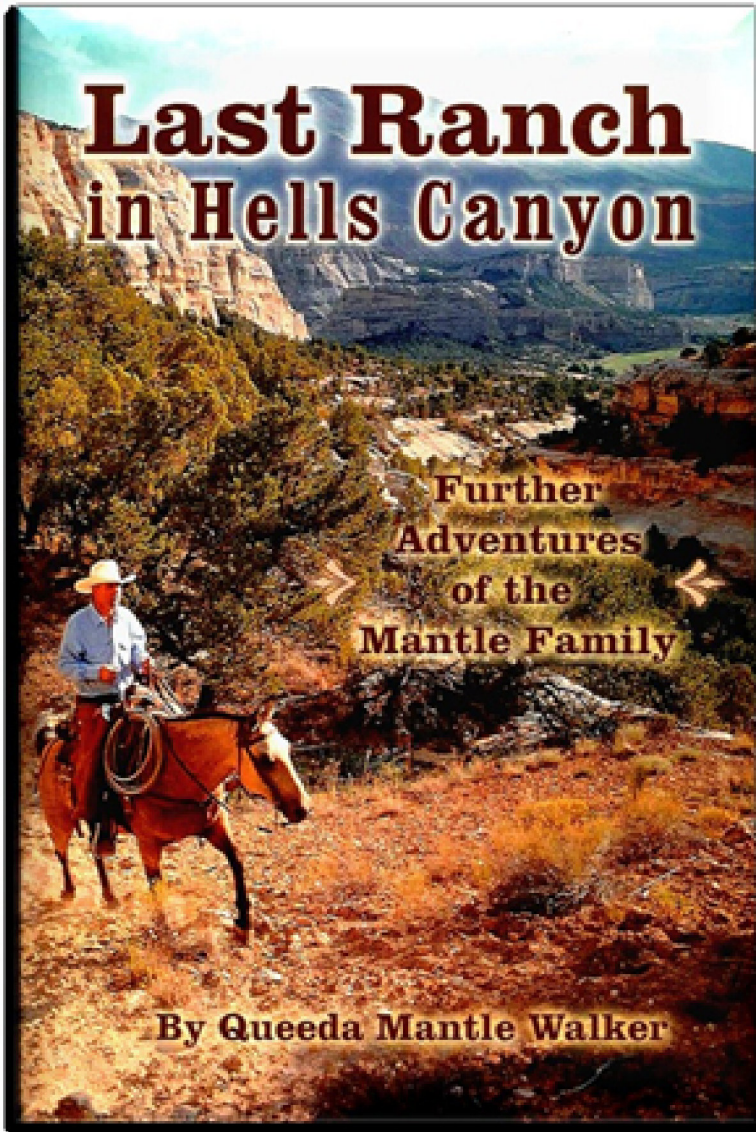


The Sombrero Ranches **Big Gulch Ranch**, 11 miles west of Craig Colorado, Hwy 40, mile marker 78

Preserving the western world:

Folks from all over the world travel to Colorado in order to experience the raw beauty of the Rocky Mountains. Many choose to explore the area on horseback and Sombrero Ranches is the largest outfitter in the state. Sombrero Ranches was created in 1958 by **Rex Ross Walker** and his brother-in-law, **Pat Mantle**. Rex, a native of Texas, had developed an intense interest in horses and traveled to Colorado when he was 11 years old in order to spend time on a ranch. Later, while still in college, Rex met Pat Mantle, a native of Colorado, who was fresh off the Mantle family ranch in far Northwest Colorado. Together they scraped up enough money to purchase 16 horses and thus began the Sombrero legacy.

But the legacy began even earlier, so let us return to Yesteryear, to 1926, when the Mantle Ranch, located in Hell's Canyon, was homesteaded by newlyweds **Charley and Evelyn Mantle**.



The Rancher's Wife

(Excerpted from an article by **Queeda Mantle Walker**, published in the magazine *American Cowboy*, April/May 2012)

The life of **Evelyn Mantle** was much like other frontier women – hard and lonely, yet rewarding – except that hers was in the 20th century. Isolated in a remote Colorado canyon with her husband and five children, her story is one for the ages.

My mother, Evelyn Fuller, was 14 years old in 1921 when her family arrived in Colorado. Taking advantage of the *Homestead Act*, they settled on Blue Mountain, 100 miles west of Craig Colorado and 40 miles east of tiny Jensen Utah. Evelyn Fuller dreamed of meeting a real cowboy. The cowboy of her dreams galloped up to her very door and swung gracefully off a prancing horse to introduce himself.

“Hello, I’m **Charley Mantle**, your neighbor across the creek there and a little way up *Roundtop Mountain*. I came by to meet you folks.”

In August 1926, after five years of ginger courtship, the young couple rode and drove to Vernal, Utah and got married. The next day they packed all their earthly possessions on two packhorses and rode off to their new home down in the canyons. The big open valleys on Blue Mountain narrowed into limestone formations as they approached the deep gorge of the *Yampa River* 2,000 feet below. Evelyn Mantle saw the sheer, rose and lavender colored walls of stone and the deep purple shadows of her husband’s country with the ominous name: **Hell’s Canyon Gorge**.

Hell’s Canyon burst from fury to tranquility at a gate-like rock formation made by two nearly-touching limestone pillars. This fertile bottomland was where Charley’s cattle grazed. Breathless at the beauty and wonder of it all, the optimistic young bride fell heart and soul for this place. It would be her home for the next 40 years.



Evelyn and Charley Mantle at their ranch house in Hell's Canyon Colorado. When their family began to grow, this house replaced the original 12 foot by 12 foot cabin with dirt floor and packed- dirt roof which Charley had constructed from salvaged driftwood and logs from an old cabin that had been accidentally destroyed by dynamite.



Bus Hatch with Charles and Evelyn Mantle, Harry Ratliff. In front are Potch, Pat and Queeda Mantle.



On March 9, 1933, Evelyn was riding her horse to Vernal Utah for the birth of her third baby when her horse stumbled just 10 miles into the long journey. Evelyn went into labor, and Charley barely got her back on her horse and to the Chew ranch before **Queeda Evelyn Mantle** was born. She was named Lorraine but she became Queeda when her father told her brothers they

needed a name for her that rhymed with weed. The brothers came up with Queed, and Evelyn prettied the name up by adding an A.

(**Note**) Queeda Evelyn Walker, 87, of Boulder, CO passed away on October 13, 2020 after a long battle with Parkinson's disease.

Sombrero Ranches locations:

Allenspark Stables - Allenspark Stables is strategically located adjacent to the Rocky Mountain National Park and Roosevelt National Forest. This means you have access to hundreds of miles of trails to the Wild Basin Area in Rocky Mountain National Park, back country lakes and trails in Roosevelt National Forest. In addition, there are extensive opportunities for camping, fishing and pack trips in the Indian Peaks Wilderness Area.

Estes Park Stables - Estes has long been considered the gem of the Rockies and today serves as the eastern gateway to Rocky Mountain National Park. Estes Park Stables offers miles of horseback riding on private trails on a 1000-acre cattle ranch as well as into the National Forest.

Glacier Creek Stables - This place is an ideal destination for people looking for a relaxing vacation that is far from the hustle and bustle of the city. You and your loved ones will surely enjoy the breathtaking and awe-inspiring scenery that you will witness here.

Grand Lake Stables - Our Grand Lake Stables are located on the western edge of Grand Lake Village, gateway to Rocky Mountain National Park. This location offers one very special trail called "THE RIDE," it rides into flower-laden meadows, along mountain streams, provides a dramatic climb high into the skies.

Meeker Horse Camp - Meeker Horse Camp, located on northwestern Colorado's scenic White River, is beautifully unspoiled and lightly traveled. With hundreds of miles of scenic trails in the White River National Forest and Flat Tops Wilderness Area of Colorado, you can spend a day or a week horseback riding in the mountains.

Moraine Park Stables - Moraine Park trails provides the classic Colorado mountain personality, primitive in form. The Big Thompson River, teeming with trout, runs like a ribbon through the open meadows. Often elk gather to graze in herds in the early morning or evening hours. Tall ponderosa pine, some over 300 years old, scent the air with their pleasant aroma.

Snow Mountain Ranch - The YMCA Mountain Ranch is located in the beautiful Fraser valley between Winter Park and Granby Colorado. It's just a 90 minute drive from Denver. Come ride with us on the YMCA's 5,200-acre ranch surrounded by snow-capped mountains.

Steamboat Springs - Located in the Yampa River Valley, Steamboat is a great base for a family vacation with a number of activities available in the area for young and old. In addition to horseback riding, you can enjoy the natural hot springs, hiking, biking, camping, museums, canoeing and river rafting. Adjacent to the rodeo grounds in Steamboat Springs, Steamboat Springs Stables offers horseback riding on scenic mountain trails. A perfect activity for friends, family and groups, the 1 and 2-hour rides give you an opportunity to enjoy the clean mountain air and explore this incredibly beautiful area of Colorado.

Preparation - H Stands For Horses



After watching the local Longmont TV documentary on Sombrero Ranches and the Great American Horse Drive, I knew I had to somehow prepare for it in the short time remaining before heading to Craig Colorado May 2 -6, 2012. So, I met with **Lee Peters**, coordinator of the horse drive, at the home office of Sombrero Ranches at 911 Kimbark St. in Longmont. Lee was very accommodating and shared several details not readily found on the internet. He suggested I visit **Mark Bishop** who oversees the Sombrero Ranches stables in Niwot, just a few miles south of Longmont.

The Bishop family supervises the management of the herd. They are the horse experts at Sombrero. As Rex and Queeda Walker's daughter, Freda has grown up with these magnificent animals and Mark has dedicated over 20 yrs of his life to them. The Bishops know the horses are the "stars of the show," and they dedicate all hours of the day, 7 days a week, to them. Horses that are too old for the winter pastures of northwest Colorado, or in need of medical care, are kept at the Niwot stables and pastures. This facility is also used as a horse distribution point.

When I arrived at the Niwot stables on a frosty morning with frozen ice puddles on the ground, Mark was busy unloading huge bales of hay with a farm tractor. But he readily stopped his work and answered this greenhorn's questions.





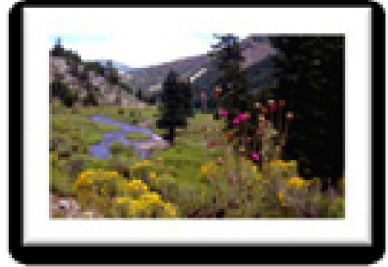
Freda Bishop

We talked about his role in supplying horses for Hollywood movies. Most of the horses used in “Lonesome Dove”, “Broken Trail”, “Centennial”, “Cowboys and Aliens”, and “The Lone Ranger” which is in production as of this 2012 writing, were from the Sombrero Ranches stables.

As Mark and I were discussing the upcoming Great American Horse Drive, he took out his cell phone and called **Christy Cramer**, a horsemanship trainer at East Slope Farms of the Rockies, located on Nelson Road, just west of Longmont. I had not been astride a horse since I was a pre-teen in Conroe Texas. My experience was limited to my brothers and me leading a horse from a barn to the far corner of a pasture, climbing on bareback with the aid of a tree stump, and holding on while the horse ran straight back to the barn.

I don’t think the owner of the horse ever knew, and we sure didn’t tell him. So, it was time to get some professional horsemanship instruction. Christy Cramer was well qualified and showed much patience with the oldest greenhorn she had ever taught.

Valle Vidal (Larry W. Jones
09/17/2006) (song#4024)



Like a lovely Mexican senorita
When the wind blows through her hair
It's like a dream when I see her
Every time I ride my pony there

Valle Vidal, Valle Vidal
I've been away too long from you
But I know you're always waiting
Under Sangre de Christo skies of blue

(instrumental)

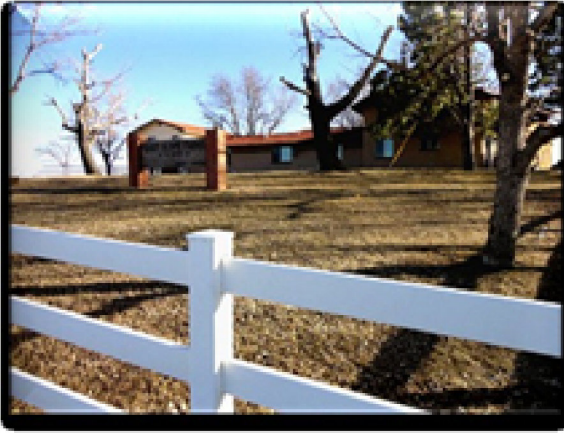
In the shadow of Wild Horse Mesa
The Valley of Life calls me again
Just as the Mexican Vermejo
Called the caballeros way back then

Valle Vidal, Valle Vidal
I've been away too long from you
But I know you're always waiting
Under Sangre de Christo skies of blue

(instrumental)

Like the wild Utes and Comanches
At the headwaters of the Rio Grande
Like a lovely Mexican senorita's call
My heart responds to your command

Valle Vidal, Valle Vidal
I've been away too long from you
But I know you're always waiting
Under Sangre de Christo skies of blue



East Slope Farms of the Rockies is located just west of Longmont on Nelson Road. The facility includes an indoor riding arena where I took my first horsemanship riding lessons. I learned how to use a pick to clean the horses' hooves, how to properly brush a horse, install a halter, put on the

saddle blanket, cinch the saddle and adjust the bridle and reins. Instructions included reining left and right, backing up and coordinating the "posting trot".



Friday April 13, 2012. Rabbit Mountain Open Space, north of Longmont. This was another two hour training session with **Christy Cramer**. My daughter, **Stephanie Leach**, is shown here astride "*Wilson*", a Sombrero Ranches black horse which was used in the Hollywood movie "**Cowboys and Aliens**". The horse I am riding is named "*Smoke*", an ex-rodeo quarterhorse used as a pick-up pony that is ridden alongside a bucking bronco so the bronc rider can jump off 'safely'?? behind the pick-up rider.

All together, I had seven riding and horsemanship lessons, from Monday March 20 – Friday April 13, 2012. They included horsemanship etiquette (don't ride across in front of adjacent rider, opening and closing pasture gates, my responsible space between other riders, etc). Other training included posting trot, cantering, lasso curling and roping, hill climbing and dangers to watch out for, such as barb wire, prairie dog holes, and anything that might spook a horse, such as a discarded piece of plastic bag flapping in the wind.

How to be prepared – the List

This information, from Sombrero Ranches, was sent to each guest wrangler. “The weather could be cold or it could be hot. You need to be prepared for both situations. A check of the weather moving from Salt Lake City, Utah toward Craig, Colorado (northwest slope of Colorado) is advised. Two years ago, the weather for the spring horse drive was hot and dry with temperatures as high as 75 degrees F (hot for Colorado) and not dropping much below 40 degrees F in the evenings. Last year, we had 8 inches of snow and wind the first two days and then two beautiful, warm, clear-sky days. This is NOT a guest ranch, so pack accordingly”.

List of Things to Bring:

Bed roll.

Cowboy hat (A MUST!) with stampede strings.

At least three changes of clothes.

All of your grooming and personal items.

Don't forget the following personal items:

Lip protection.

Aspirin, Advil.

Towel for the shower.

Something to wear on your feet while you shower.

Soap.

Shampoo.

Camera.

Pair of cowboy boots.

Extra set of footwear. (nothing worse than wet boots)

Extra socks. (clean socks keep blisters away)

Rain gear Sun screen Sunglasses.

Three types of jackets:

A light weight waterproof jacket.

A medium weight jacket. (like a jean jacket or a cotton front zip)

A heavy jacket. (Carhartt type is best but any will do)

Women in the past have suggested pantyhose be worn all the time; (none of the men will admit to wearing any.)

If you have chaps or chinks, bring them.

Horse Drive Agenda

WEDNESDAY MAY 2nd (Everyone arrives at Big Gulch Ranch)

4:00 PM – Welcome by **Cody Rex Walker**

Sombrero presentation by **Lee Peters**

Group assignments with Lead Cowboys – **Ed Pinkard**

7:00 PM – Dinner in the Mess Hall – **Carrie Sykes** and **Cara Jensen** – (Cooks)

THURSDAY MAY 3rd

6:00 AM – Breakfast in the Mess Hall 8:00 AM – Individual Horse Selections

Break into three groups, Instructions & Tack Fitting with team leaders: **Johnny Garcia, Terry Humphrey, Chuck Hummel**

12:00 Noon – Lunch at Mess Hall

1:30 PM – Station 1 – Horse herd selection – **Bryan “Kansas” Seck**

Group 1 first, Group 3 second, Group 2 third

Station 2 – Horse care, ID & Management – **Donald Broom** Group 2 first, Group 1 second, Group 3 third

Station 3 – Cattle Management – **Ed Pinkard** Group 3 first, Group 2 second, Group 1 third

3:00 PM – Gather Ride (Round up horses) 5:00 PM – Happy hour at campfire

6:00 PM – Dinner in Mess Hall

7:00 PM - Professional Photographers show at The Hampton Inn in Craig.



Horse Drive Agenda

FRIDAY May 4TH

6:00 AM – Breakfast in Mess Hall
 7:00 AM – Get horses ready
 10:00 AM – Ranch and Wildlife “Outback” Ride – Ed Pinkard & Donald Broom
 2:00 PM – Cook-out at “Eagle Rock” – Cody Walker
 Fireside Chat on Big Gulch ranch history – Rex & Cody Walker
 4:00 PM – Ride back to Ranch House
 Branding dissertation – Donald Broom
 Roping Demonstration and Corral Work – Ed Pinkard
 5:00 PM – “Guns ‘n Gear” – Chuck Brix, alias “Silver Buck Chuck”
 8:00 PM – Dinner in Mess Hall

SATURDAY MAY 4th

5:30 AM – Breakfast in Mess Hall
 7:30 AM – Leave for “Browns Park” and “Lone Mountain” corrals
 9:00 AM – **Great American Horse Drive** begins
 1:00 PM – Sack lunch on the trail
 3:00 PM – End of first day at the Yampa River Turn-out pasture, west of Maybell
 4:00 PM – Happy Hour at Big Gulch Ranch
 6:00 PM – Dinner in Mess Hall

SUNDAY MAY 6th

6:00 AM Breakfast in Mess Hall
 7:30 AM – Leave for the Yampa River Turn-out pasture
 9:00 AM – Second day of Horse Drive begins
 11:00 AM – Drive horse herd through Maybell Colorado
 1:00 PM – Sack lunch on the trail
 4:00 PM – 2012 Great American Horse Drive completed at Big Gulch Ranch
 4:30 PM – Gate-to-Gate trophy belt buckle presentation & Barbecue (Ed Pinkard, Lee Peters, Cody Walker, Freda & Mark Bishop)

MONDAY MAY 7th

7:00 AM – Breakfast in Mess Hall
 Leave for home with great memories of the Great American Horse Drive!



The Prairie Wind (Larry W. Jones 10/08/2006)
(song#4043)

The prairie wind was my best friend
When it brought my love to me

It lingered here part of the year
As if it had heard my lonely plea
We rode along with a western song
Played on the prairie wind

Like a dream by a flowing stream
The days went drifting by
The world we knew was brand new too
Underneath the prairie sky

(instrumental)

Then one day I heard you say
That you must go away
I thought the prairie wind was my best friend
But when it called to you that way
I lost my love and my best friend
To the prairie wind

I can't pretend to comprehend
Why you had to go
I'm so lonely for you only
Cause I still love you so

And now I know what brought this woe
When the lonely nights descend
Once I called him my best friend
The prairie wind
The prairie wind
The prairie wind

Arrival – The Big Day – Craig Colorado

The drive from Longmont to Craig took five hours. There were two ways to go since the Trail Ridge Road through Rocky Mountain National Park wasn't scheduled to open until the end of May. So, I could either go south through Boulder and Denver, then west on I-70, through the Eisenhower Tunnel, then north to Craig;

Or, the northern route which I chose. Departing on Wednesday May 2nd at 7:00 AM in my loaded 2008 Jeep Liberty, I drove through farm and ranch land on Hwy 287 to Loveland. There I turned west on Hwy 34, then north again on Road 27, also known as Buckhorn Road. Winding through the morning light reflecting on narrow valleys and open meadows, I reached Hwy 14, known as the *Cache la Poudre Canyon Highway* (called POODER by locals.) Turning west I followed the spectacular Poudre (say POODER) River through the steep and awe-inspiring walls of Poudre Canyon.



I stopped to take a photo of 10,249' Cameron Pass which is a gap between the Medicine Bow Mountains and the Never Summer Mountains.

Muddy Pass straddles the continental divide along the boundary between Jackson and Grand counties. The pass separates North Park and the headwaters of the North Platte River with Middle Park near the headwaters of the Colorado River. It is named for Muddy Creek, a tributary of the Colorado that descends southward from the pass to join the Colorado at Kremmling, on the western slope of the Rockies.



Descending the Western Slope of the northern Rockies, I passed through **Walden, Steamboat Springs, Hayden**, and finally turned right at mile marker 78 on Hwy 40, eleven miles west of Craig. The **Big Gulch Ranch** and my big expectations lay in sight.

The Big Gulch Ranch is a working horse ranch, encompassing 20,000 acres of **Routt National Forest**. Elevations vary from 6,600' to 7,100'. The ranch is located in the rolling sagebrush hills that are the lower slopes of the **Elkhead Mountains**.



I arrived at Noon, just in time to chow-down on the first of many simple but very tasteful working-cowboy dishes. Meals were prepared in the ranch kitchen, served buffet style, and then taken to the Mess Hall (tent) to eat.

The ranch kitchen was run by **Carrie Sykes** and **Cara Jensen**. Their food was always ready on time, delicious and just what a bunch of working wranglers needed for the full days of horse-wrangling activities. Pancakes, eggs, bacon, sausage, chicken, steak, porkchops, barbecue, desserts. Yes, cowboys are allowed to eat with their Stetsons on.



The **Mess Hall** (tent) was a popular gathering place in the early mornings where coffee was already brewed. Lunches were consumed here, unless we were on an **Outback Ride** or during the Horse Drive on Saturday and Sunday. Evening dinners were eaten here.

On Wednesday afternoon, head wrangler Ed Pinkard prepared my first horse by supervising the saddling and bridling. While he did the same for many other guest wranglers, I “got-my-cowboy-on” by riding around a small round pen and then a much larger square pen. My first horse was a big red **Belgian draft horse**. Although bigger than most of the other horses, a Belgian draft horse has a gentler demeanor and is easier to control. Sombbrero Ranches brands a number on all their horses for easy identification when renting them out to tourists and hunters. My horse was **#3295**.





All wranglers received a Wrangler brand jacket. Lettering on the back reads: “Sombrero – Shut Up And Ride – Horse Drive.” Christy Cramer and Bryan “Kansas” Seck checked off the list of jacket recipients. Yes, that is a can of Coors in Christy’s hand. Every evening was Happy-Hour around the campfires with Coors beer provided for anyone who wished to imbibe. I never saw a single overindulgence though.

When The Sage Is In Purple Bloom
(Larry W Jones 09/22/2010) (song#6243)

Whippoorwills call and dogies bawl
Out on the windy prairie wide
There's no ill with the bluebird's trill
Along cattle trails cowboys ride

Sidewinders wind and horned toads dine
In the hot sand around high noon
Roping is fine at roundup time
When the sage is in purple bloom

(instrumental)

Morning light shows old cookie's pan
Is full of grub for every man
They all line up behind the chuck
For breakfast and a coffee can

When the sun sets and then it gets
Cool under the big western moon
Fiddles ring with a western swing
When the sage is in purple bloom

(instrumental)

They don't worry about weather
Whether it's sunny, snow or hail
Cowboys still ride through the heather
Out on the lonesome cattle trails

Now, some old pards have seen hard times
But they're talk is never of gloom
They'll return for small pay they earn
When the sage is in purple bloom

When the sun sets and then it gets
Cool under the big western moon
Fiddles ring with a western swing
When the sage is in purple bloom



Thursday May 5th Get Serious Day

On Wednesday, all the guest wranglers had arrived, either by vehicle or flying in to the Yampa Valley Regional Airport at Hayden and picked up there by Sombrero staff. The three groups were now organized, with fifteen guest riders in each group. Now it was time to get down to serious business about just why we all were here. After all, this is a Working Ranch, not a dude or guest ranch. With the two-day, sixty-two mile horse drive looming, it was imperative to pay undivided attention to instructions, how-to's, and don't do's.

After a filling 6:00 AM breakfast of eggs, pancakes, bacon, sausage and coffee, my bunkmate **Dennis Neitzel** and I joined our group at 8:00 AM for individual horse selections, instructions and tack fitting. **Johnny Garcia**, who runs the Sombrero Ranches stables in Phoenix Arizona, was our group leader, along with my personal horsemanship instructor **Christy Cramer**, from Lyons Colorado. All wranglers were issued a leather "saddle tag" with the Sombrero Hat brand on it. This tag, with our names on it, was affixed to the saddle with leather strings to aid in quickly finding our individual saddle, saddle blanket and reins. We had to remember our horse's number and quickly claim the horse when it was led by halter rope from the morning round-up pens. We then tied, brushed and saddled the horse, with care, as quickly as possible.





On the right is my bunkmate, **Dennis Neitzel**, from Midlothian Texas. This was his second time as a Sombrero guest wrangler. Dennis is an electrical safety and maintenance training engineer with AVO (amps-volts-ohms) Training Institute, a subsidiary of the Megger electrical test equipment company. Dennis owns two horses and is an accomplished rider. During his first visit, he assisted the Sombrero wranglers with the early morning round-up from the grazing pastures. As the oldest greenhorn, I felt privileged to be in company with an experienced rider such as Dennis Neitzel.

After lunch, at 1:30 PM we received *Horse Herd Selection* information from Bryan “Kansas” Seck; Horse Care, ID and Management from Donald Broom; and Cattle Management from Ed Pinkard. We learned how to tell the age of a horse by examining his teeth or by feeling the size of the gap between its ribs.

At 3:00 PM we went on a “**Gather**” which is a cowboy’s commonly used term for a roundup. With much riding, reining, yelping, hollering and swinging of the ends of our leather reins or curled lassos, we drove a herd of horses from the grazing pastures to the corral pens. I quickly learned how to eat dust and knew that riding drag during the horse drive on Saturday and Sunday would explain the need for a bandana.

After the 3:00 PM “Gather”, there was another Happy Hour around the campfire behind the kitchen, shower time and then dinner in the Mess Hall at 6:00 PM. At the end of this full day in the saddle, I had completed four rides on two different horses.

In the morning, on my big Belgian draft horse, a ride around the small pen and then the large square pen was followed by a pasture ride with the other 14 wranglers in my group, led by **Johnny Garcia** and **Christy Cramer**. In the afternoon we did the same sequence on our second horse, in my case, a smooth-hair, fiery red quarterhorse. Each wrangler needed two horses; one for the 30 mile Saturday drive and a fresh horse for the final 32 mile Sunday drive.

On Friday, I would be riding my quarterhorse on the 12 mile Outback and Wildlife Ride and back. That horse would rest at the Big Gulch Ranch on Saturday while I rode my Belgian draft horse for the Saturday horse drive from the winter pastures to the turn-out pasture west of Maybell. On Sunday I would be riding my quarterhorse on the final 32 miles from Maybell to the Big Gulch Ranch outside Craig.

For three days prior to our arrival, a group of professional photographers attended a workshop at the ranch, sponsored by Nikon. They took thousands of photos of the Sombrero wrangler staff performing ranch activities, many of which are only seen in real rodeos and Hollywood movies. The annual Sombrero calendar is filled with their professional images. These photographers were on hand during the big horse drive, riding in the bed of pickup trucks and other vehicles. On Thursday evening at 7:00 PM they gave a presentation in Craig at The Hampton Inn.

Professional photographer **Ping-Tzu** is from Korea. She was one of the many photographers in the Nikon Photographers Workshop. I took this amateur photo of her at the Browns Park Winter Pastures on Saturday morning May 5th.





This is just a small portion of the many saddles needed for all the riding activities at the Big Gulch Ranch and during the Great American Horse Drive Saturday and Sunday.



On Friday May 4th, approximately 60 wranglers participated in the “**Outback and Wildlife Ride**” which is a 10- 12 mile ride from the main ranch. This ride was to condition us for the 30 mile horse drive on Saturday and 32 mile final drive on Sunday. Going out, we did the “**Ridge Ride**” which presented some spectacular panoramic views of the 20,000 acre Big Gulch Ranch. We saw deer, antelope, elk and eagles along the way. Part of the outback ride included numerous valleys, gulches, watering holes, as well as obstacles to avoid, such as prairie dog holes and dangerous sheer cliffs.



This is a close-up of an eagle's nest. We were on top of a ridge with a sheer cliff, looking down the valley at this rock. The eagle was flying around in the sky awaiting our leave.



We tied our horses and loosened their cinches at Eagle Rock.

The Outback lunch was some “mighty good cookin’.



The Hat Brand

The story of the Sombrero Ranch Horse Drive – by **R.L. Stave**
It is still dark with dry, crusty cold and a skiff of snow on the ground. It is May, springtime in the Rockies. Five Sombrero cowboys are saddling their horses to round up the remuda of two hundred head of horses at the Big Gulch Ranch, twelve miles west of Craig, Colorado. It is still a week before the horse drive when the Sombrero horses (*the largest horse herd in North America*) are gathered and driven sixty-two miles in two days from the Browns Park Ranch, a sixty thousand acre pasture, to the twenty thousand acre Big Gulch Ranch. The Sombrero horse drive has been repeated every spring for the last fifty one years, and as time will have it, there have been many changes.

The Old Days – Fifty one years ago, an unlikely partnership was forged between **Pat Mantle** and **Rex Walker**. Pat was a tough, hard-nosed cowboy from the western slope. Rex Walker was from Tyler, Texas and a geology student at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Their common bond was that Rex had married Pat's younger sister, **Queeda Mantle**, when they were students at the University. While Rex was in graduate school, Pat and Rex decided to go into the horse business. Between the two of them, they didn't have two nickels to rub together. However, they figured out a way to acquire sixteen head of horses and an old stock truck. Some of the horses they rented out to a kid's camp. The rest of the horses were trucked up to **Estes Park** where they put up a tent, a temporary corral, and started renting horses to vacationers for \$1.50 per hour. At that time, Estes Park sported more than fifty riding stables. Pat and Rex were able to register their **Hat Brand** (even though the old lady at the Brand Board didn't like it much) and Sombrero Ranch was born.

Over the years, Sombrero stables were established in **Grand Lake, Steamboat Springs, Boulder, Breckenridge, Allenspark,** and **Rocky Mountain National Park** under the *Box- L* brand. Other stables were established in **Arizona** at Phoenix's South Mountain, Scottsdale and Carefree. The herd grew from the original sixteen head to more than a thousand head that are rented to kid's camps, dude ranches, individuals, stables and movie makers. In the Fall, they are rented to hunters. The horses work from June until the end of hunting season when the majority go to winter pasture.

The older horses go to Arizona or are kept at the **Niwot Farm** pastures because they are too old to winter at Browns Park.

The partnership between Rex and Pat remained in place until Pat's death in 1992. Pat is buried at Browns Park Ranch. The funeral was held at the Craig Fairground where more than five hundred people attended.

Pat had been responsible for the horses and wintering them in Browns Park. He also ran the Steamboat Springs stable in the summer. Rex, on the other hand, not only knew horses but had the business savvy to build Sombrero Ranches into what it is today. Not always riding the desk, Rex at one point owned the **7-11 Rodeo Company** and acquired **High Country Stables Corporation**, a two-stable concession in Rocky Mountain National Park. His land holdings doubled then tripled into the tens of thousands of acres both on the western and eastern slopes. With the growing herd and demand for rental horses, Rex added hundreds of saddles and tack along with a trucking company, a hay farm and a mixed herd of cattle.

The "good old days" were not that good working the horse drive. Life was hard-core western, no place for the faint of heart. Paid cowboys and Pat's old pals from surrounding ranches would all lend a hand. As a group, they were rough, tough, course and sometimes on the mean side. They were clannish with a deep distrust of anyone from the eastern slope. They rode hard, drank hard, and a good fist fight was not out of the ordinary. There were also cowboy groupies from Steamboat and Vail who would tag along for the adventure.

In those days, you put your bedroll any place you could find a spot. There was a bunkhouse at Big Gulch and a kitchen of sorts. There is a story about **John Wesley Hardin** shooting a man because he was snoring. If he had been sleeping in the Big Gulch bunkhouse, he would have shot the whole crew. The cooks and swamper (helper or handyman) were all but Shanghaied from Denver's Larimer Street's slum bars.

They would work the duration of the drive – splitting wood, cooking and swamping out the bathroom and the bunkhouse. They would sign up for the drive while they were drunk and when they woke up

the next morning they were at Big Gulch in the middle of nowhere. So there was no quitting or change of heart.

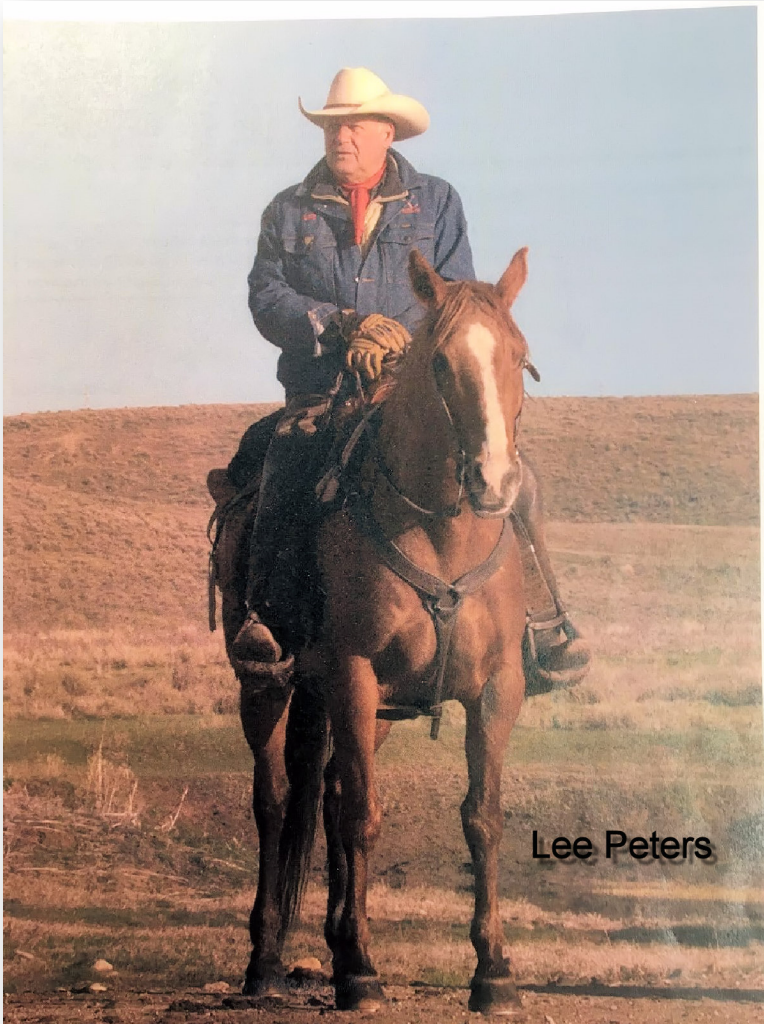
The mounts were all rough-cut young colts without manners or much of an education. In the morning, Pat would rope out a horse and it was your job to stay on the *hurricane deck* of those green colts and try not to have a *wreck* or get in the way. Gathering the horses at Browns Park's expanse of high desert and sagebrush meant seemingly endless hours in the saddle until the whole herd was in the holding pens. The morning of the drive, the gates would be opened and the horses would make the five mile **mad dash for the Yampa River**, flanked by five or six cowboys keeping the lead horses under control until they could be bunched at the river. Once watered and settled, they were started off at a trot to Big Gulch where they would be sorted and shipped to their summer destinations.

Sombrero Ranches has always been owned and operated by the Walker family. As time marched on, with the death of Pat and the fact that Rex Walker is now seventy six years old, although you would never know it seeing him on a horse, he still remains a driving force in the business. He has stepped back from the day-to-day operation but remains ever-present in the ranching operation that has taken a lifetime to build. "With this horse drive, I'm trying to keep the West alive", states Rex.

The Walker children have taken over the day-to-day operation of the outfit. Responsibilities have been split up. **Cody Walker** runs the Corporation operation, managing all the stable operations, leases, advertising and the marketing. **Mark and Freda (Walker) Bishop** have the responsibility of maintaining the horse herd and acquiring new horses. Mark and Sombrero horse buyers travel the horse sale circuit from Wyoming, Montana and Canada buying horses. There are only about half the sale barns still operating as there once were, and good, sound, even-tempered horses are harder and harder to find these days.

It was Cody walker and **Lee Peters** who came up with the idea of the "*Great American Horse Drive*" twelve years ago. Why not sell the drive to the public? There are people who are looking for the western experience as a vacation with a touch of real adventure and accomplishment. Through advertising and marketing, the first drive

was in 1998, with nine guest riders. By 2010, the drive had grown to fifty paying guest riders, many of them repeat riders from previous years. Paying guests are not coddled or over protected. They become participating wranglers to the best of their ability. Experience is not required, but it does help. The real requirement is willingness to learn, desire and a certain amount of grit. If riders make the two-day drive, they are awarded the coveted, custom made “**Gate to Gate**” trophy belt buckle as proof of their determination.



For a week, guests are treated to real ranch life. Big Gulch is a working ranch, not a dude ranch. They receive riding lessons and are assigned two horses and a saddle for the ride. Guests who are highly motivated get up with the paid wranglers to help gather the night pasture horses before daylight. Sombrero also throws in a Wildlife ride with a steak fry, complete with music from local cowboy songsters. Rex Walker gives a great talk on ranching and the history of the area. At one point he was asked how many languages he spoke. He answered, “English, Spanish and *Texacan*”. With questioning looks from the guests, he simply added, “That’s English with bad grammar.”

The guests sleep in the bunkhouse and take their meals in the cook shack with the wranglers. They spend two days helping to move the herd. One of the high points of the drive is on day two, when the herd passes down Main Street in **Maybell, Colorado**. The town of Maybell sports one gas station, one restaurant, a fire house and a population somewhere around two hundred. The locals have always turned out to see the Sombrero horses go through their town at a high trot.



Queeda Walker, Rex’s wife of fifty five years, calls the drive “a celebration of spring”. She goes on to say, “It’s old west tradition. The kids get to see horses as an exciting thing, not just something you get in a pony ring. I am sure they all want to be cowboys after seeing how much fun our boys are having.” These days, people come from all over the country to see the horses come through Maybell. It is a spectacle they will not see anywhere else. The horse drive has grown into the annual **Maybell Days**, with a dance, potluck dinner and hay rides for the kids. The park in the center of town now hosts an

arts fair where local artisans sell their wares. There is even a blacksmith demonstrating his trade. The drive has put Maybell in AAA’s guidebook on the list of destinations, referring to the event as “Maybell Cultural Heritage Days.” In 2010, about fifteen hundred people attended the festival and watched the horses come through town.

Wranglers and Guests

Ed Pinkard is the head wrangler, a no-nonsense, all around cowboy. He has been with the outfit for seven years. He also coordinates all the movie and commercial work where Sombrero horses are being used. Some of the movies include **Centennial**, **Comanche Moon**, **Lonesome Dove**, **Return to Lonesome Dove**, **Avenging Angel**, **Cowboys and Aliens**, **The Lone Ranger**, and more just to name a few. Along with Cody Walker, he hires the working wranglers. Just being a top-notch cowboy is not the only criteria. You have to be good with people and have the patience of Job and a good sense of humor.

Lee Peters is the ride coordinator wrangling the paperwork. He has been with Sombrero since 1966, when he started working with Rex on Boulder's "**Little Britches Rodeo**."

Donald Broom, who started with the outfit when he was ten years old, was adopted into the Walker family. He now manages the Big Gulch Ranch and Steamboat Springs stables. He makes sure everything is ready for the guest riders when they arrive at the ranch. The wranglers are bronc riders, team ropers, working ranch hands and farriers. They do re-rides on all 200 head of horses the paying guests will be riding. They also give riding and herding instruction and a lot of encouragement to all the guests.

The guests come from all over the country and the world and every walk of life. The common theme is that they want to experience western life up close, be part of the real west and its heritage. Most come with a goal – they want the belt buckle and the bragging rights to go with it when they get back home, to know that they did something a little more than play a few rounds of golf. The Great American Horse Drive means something different to each rider and will be remembered long after the drive is over.

Boots In the Stirrups (Larry W. Jones 09/14/2011) (song#6282)

My Dad was a rancher on a spread that was rough
But he kept a cool head when the ranching got tough
He scraped out a living in the Springtime roundups
For biscuits on the table, boots in the stirrups

When we all gathered round the table, Dad led in prayer
Thanked God for being able to buy clothes to wear
Mama served him coffee in his fav'rite tin cup
And made sure he had polished boots in the stirrups

(instrumental)

He branded cattle and helped neighbors raise their barn
When folks asked for favors he gave them his strong arm
And he was there when someone needed a cheer up
Dad would help them to keep their boots in the stirrups

Back then I learned lessons that some men never learn
When hard times beckon, pull your boot straps up real firm
You had better be a man and keep your chin up
Be a cowboy and keep your boots in the stirrups





Chuck Brix (Silver Buck Chuck) is a collector of authentic old western firearms. He gave a most interesting presentation of his historic pistols, rifles and other items from the real west. All who wanted to shoot a Colt 45 pistol and a real Buffalo Gun was given the chance to do so (after his safety instructions) and we got to keep the empty shell casing from the buffalo gun we fired, a 45 caliber that held 70 grains of black powder that gave a real kick.





My souvenir Buffalo Gun 45/70 shell casing.



Shooting the single-action Colt 45 revolver. Single-action means that the hammer had to be pulled back each time before the trigger was pulled. It was adopted as the standard military service revolver until 1892. Offered in over 30 different calibers and various barrel lengths, its overall appearance has remained consistent since 1873.

This revolver was popular with ranchers, lawmen, and outlaws alike, and its design influenced the production of numerous other models from other companies. This gun had six notches on the back of the grip. Three notches toward the top right side indicated the killing of three white men. Three notches toward the bottom left side were for killing Indians or Mexicans. Racial prejudice went as far as the grave. As Silver Buck Chuck said, “Killing white men meant more than killing other races”.



One of several “fire rings” used during our stay at the ranch. This one is located behind the kitchen with the view looking north. Happy-Hours were held around the fire ring. The stagecoach in the back is fully operational. It can be seen in many photos during the big horse drive through Maybell Colorado. We got to witness a demonstration of how to properly harness a team of four horses for it, and how to make them back up, turn left, turn right and in a circle. Many streets in towns today are very wide. The reason is that freight wagons and stage coaches needed a lot of turning around room.



“Cow Bales” were positioned at all the fire ring sites for practicing our roping. Roping technique involves proper wrist action. Lariat and riata are both derived from the Spanish *la reata* (the rope). The classic nineteenth-century lariat was made from the fibers of the agave plant, sometimes called a “magee” or “grass rope,” and was generally used by cowboys who tied their ropes “hard-and-fast”, a roping technique that entails tightly tying one end of a rope to the saddle horn.

In contrast, the classic riata was made of braided rawhide and used by buckaroos who “dallied”, a roping technique that involves winding a rope around the saddle horn and relying upon friction to secure it (from the Spanish *dale vuelta*, “give it a turn.”). Today, most cowboy ropes are made of nylon, are generally called “lariats,” and may be used in either the hard-and-fast or dally style of roping. Before I went on the horse drive, I bought my used nylon lariat off eBay from a big ranch south of Amarillo. A brand new nylon lariat is very stiff, whereas a used one is more flexible, easier to throw and much easier to roll into loops after throwing.



This is what a rope burn looks like, and it feels like it looks! On Wednesday and Thursday I did not wear gloves since I had more “feel” in handling the reins and doing the saddling. Starting Friday, I wore gloves all the time, even though the rubbing inside the glove stung like crazy. This souvenir lasted for a couple weeks after the horse drive was over.

Friday
outback ride.
Note right
rear saddle
tag.



Let The Drive Begin

Saturday May 5th – Out of our bunks at 4:30 AM. Breakfast in the Mess Hall at 5:30 AM. Get my Saturday horse (the big Belgian draft) halter-tied, brushed and saddled, and with the reins, which would be used later, tied to the saddle. Don't forget the “saddle-horn saddle-bags” that held water bottles, energy bars, beef jerky and Advil. Load all the horses into two big eighteen-wheeler horse trailers. At 7:30 AM, board school busses and leave in a big procession for the winter pastures at **Browns Park** and the **Lone Mountain Corrals**, sixty two miles farther west.



Two of these tractor-trailers were loaded with the wranglers' horses. Some of the Sombrero staff had their own horse trailers in which they transported their steeds.

The horse drive on Saturday was scheduled to begin at 9:00 AM but when we arrived, the wranglers were still gathering herd after herd of horses and driving them into big corrals. I didn't mind since the sights and sounds of half-wild horses galloping through clouds of dust ahead of thunder-cracking bull whips was exhilarating to say the least.



The winter pastures at Browns Park is on BLM (Bureau of Land Management) property. It consists of over 60,000 acres of open range land. When the horse rental season is over at the end of hunting season, most of the Sombrero Ranches horses are brought here for the winter.

But before doing so, each horse has to have its horse shoes removed since their hooves continue to grow, and they cannot be attended to in case a shoe comes loose. By the time of the **Spring Gather** (roundup), these horses have been roaming the open miles of BLM lands and have become half wild.

Just before the guest wranglers arrive at the Big Gulch Ranch, approximately 200 of these horses are gathered and taken to Big Gulch where they get new shoes, are vaccinated, treated for cuts and any other care needed. Then each one is saddled for the first time in six months and undergoes a “**re-ride**” by a Sombrero cowboy, usually a younger cowboy who has the experience, savvy and reflexes needed for breaking a bucking bronco. Sometimes a guest wrangler becomes a bronc rider. The bronc gets another “re-ride.”



Mad Dash For The Yampa

Finally the Lone Mountain Corrals gates are opened and the lead wranglers ride ahead of the herd, setting the pace for 800 head of horses on Moffat County dirt road number 10. The flank riders' responsibility is to keep the herd together in as compact a line as possible, and to chase and return any horse that tries to escape the herd.

All guest wranglers, along with our experienced team leaders, are lined up ready to ride drag at the back of the herd. Drag riders had to form as tight a line across the rear of the herd as possible, to prevent horses from breaking through the rear and trotting off in the wrong direction.

Alertness was imperative. With fast riding, reining, yelping and hollering, escaping horses were returned to the main herd. Most of the horses had not drank water in quite awhile and were thirsty.

They could smell the water at the Yampa River five miles away. Therefore, the first five miles of the drive was at a fast pace, from a posting trot to a full gallop. It truly was an exciting and mad dash to the Yampa!



At the Yampa River, all wranglers formed a barrier line around the herd while the horses filled up on water and ate green grass. 25 more miles to the turn-out pasture.



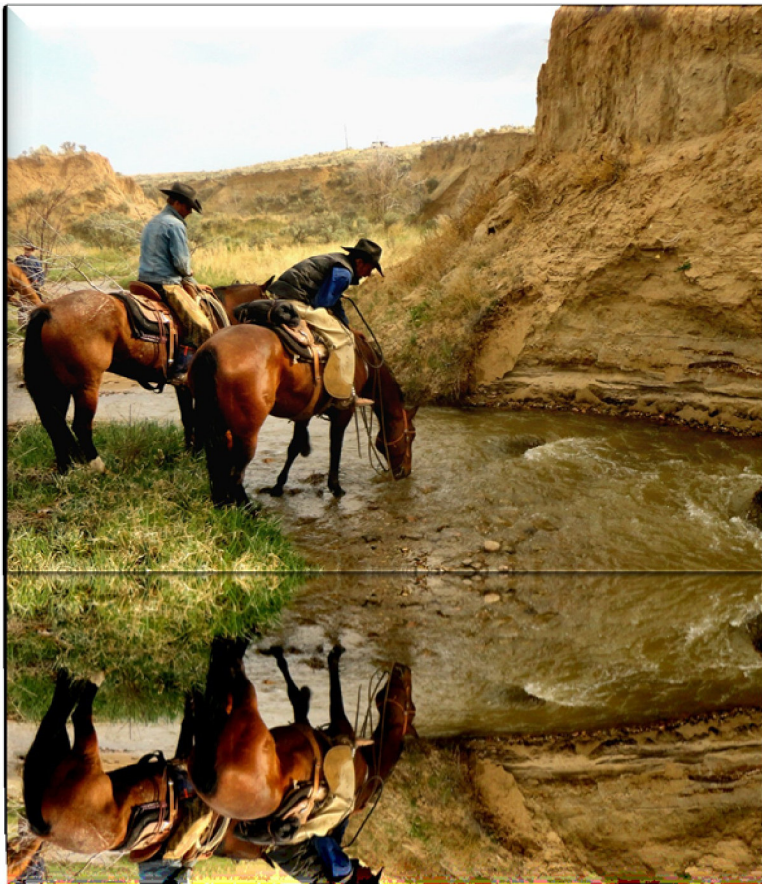
My Saturday horse was #3295, a big Belgian draft horse.

End of the 30-mile drive on Saturday, at the turnout pasture on the Yampa River, west of Maybell, Colorado. Here, all the guest wranglers' horses were unsaddled and released to become part of the big herd. We loaded our saddles, saddle blankets, head halters and reins in trailers, to be used on Sunday. We then boarded busses and headed back to the Big Gulch Ranch, tired but excited about tomorrow.



A portion of the herd is shown grazing along Moffat County Road 10.





Sunday The Final Drive

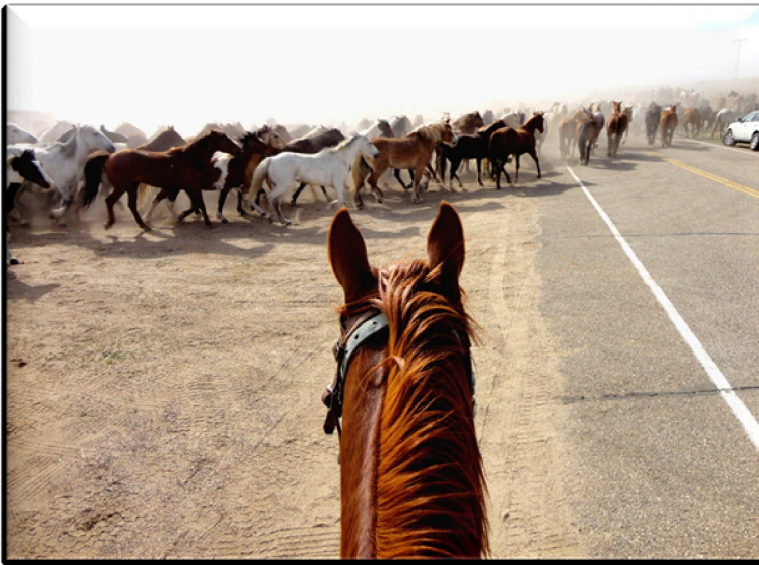
Same procedure as Saturday. Roll out at 5:00 AM, breakfast, get horses ready, load horses, board busses for Maybell. Lots of aches and pains but nobody complaining.



Cody Walker drove our bus on Saturday and Sunday. We left early enough Sunday to make a stop in Maybell to visit the historic 1933 Maybell Store. When the horse herd is driven through Maybell, everybody wants to get photos with this store in the background. My wife, Lydia, with daughter, son-in-law and grandson, Stephanie, Doyle and Brogan Leach, drove over from Longmont to get photos here and from several spots along the route of the horse drive. They said it was thrilling to see.



These two school busses were used to transport the guest wranglers to the Lone Mountain Corrals at Browns Park winter pastures on Saturday, and to the turnout pasture west of Maybell on Sunday. We enjoyed watching the landscape roll by.



Sunday May 6th. Herd leaving the turnout pasture west of Maybell

The turnout pasture is on Colorado Hwy 318, a short distance from Hwy 40 which runs east and west through Maybell. As we approached Maybell, I was riding drag in the left side ditch. Just as we entered Maybell, my quarterhorse decided to exit the ditch to get up onto the paved road. He chose his exit under a tree with low limbs. All I could think of was getting knocked off my horse by a tree limb at the very time when every rider wants to make a good show for the tourists lining the street. Just in time, I leaned and ducked forward, parallel to the horse's neck and went under the limb as it scraped against my cowboy hat. Fortunately the hat stayed on and I retained my dignity riding through Maybell, waving at my family who were cheering me on.

After passing through Maybell, we corralled the herd on the right side of Hwy 40 by forming a continuous mounted barrier while tourist vehicles left the town heading east toward Craig. Several times we had to herd the horses off the road while a wrangler led vehicles through the herd, sometimes at too fast a clip for comfort. After one lunch stop along the highway, we drove the herd non-stop to the Big Gulch Ranch, completing the 32 miles for the Sunday drive. The last mile was the most harrowing of all!

The Last Mile – What A Ride

Word had already been spread about the last mile of the horse drive, how it would be different from any of the previous sixty one miles, including the beginning five mile dash to the Yampa River. But before I spill the details, a proper setting for it is in order. As mentioned, my Sunday steed was a fiery red prancing quarterhorse. All horses have their individual demeanor and this one was no exception. On Sunday morning when we arrived at the turnout pasture west of Maybell, the wranglers' horses were unloaded from the two big eighteen wheeler horse trailers. I took hold of the halter rope and led the horse to one of the privately owned horse trailers that had bars along the side where horses could be tied while being saddled and bridled.

As usual, I tied the halter rope around the bar with two quick-release pull loops. Then I brushed the horse, put on the saddle blanket and saddle, and cinched the saddle. All was going well. But when I went to put on the bridle, the horse didn't want to take the bit and pulled his head away to the right. After talking softly to the horse, I tried again

to install the bridle. At that point he went into wild bronc rodeo mode, jerked hard against the halter rope, and started kicking furiously. This startled the horse to my left side and he also panicked. I immediately turned and ran from between the two horses as fast as my Tony Lama boots could carry me.

Ed Pinkard, the head wrangler, was standing nearby and he came over to take control of the situation. The quick-release double loop halter rope had been pulled so tight that Ed had difficulty in getting it pulled loose. After he quieted the horse, he successfully installed the bridle. Then he directed one of the Sombrero wranglers to “pony him around”, leading the horse by the halter rope behind the wrangler’s horse. After the “pony around”, the wrangler got astride the saddle and rode him around the pasture for awhile. After this, the horse seemed to be settled down and ready for the oldest greenhorn to mount-up and get ready for the drive, which I did with no problem.

After passing through Maybell, during our lunch on the wide shoulder along Hwy 40, We were preparing to resume the drive and I was tying the halter rope to the left front of the saddle, with the bottom of the loop at the horse’s left leg shoulder. This was as my horsemanship instructor had taught me. It also allowed the horse to get his head down to eat grass. Ed requested that I tie it to the saddle horn instead. I mentioned to him that I had been shown the other way, and since I had saddle-horn saddle-bags, there wasn’t much room for wrapping the rope. Ed tied the rope to the left front of the saddle, but with a shorter loop so the horse couldn’t eat grass, since a wrangler’s horse stopping to eat grass could become a problem in keeping the horse drive moving.

As we continued moving the herd, we took note of each mile marker we passed, looking for that last one, mile marker 78, where we would turn left off Hwy 40 toward the Big Gulch Ranch. My horse was continually trying to bend its head down to eat grass when we were stopped or riding slowly. However, he couldn’t due to the halter rope being tied with a shorter loop than at the beginning of Sunday’s drive. This seemed to really irritate him and he quit responding to my reining commands, either for turning left, right or slowing down. I mentioned this to another guest wrangler riding beside me and he said, “He’s tired”, which was the truth, as all the horses were by that time.

Riding fast along the paved portion of the highway shoulder, not jerking, I pulled on the reins to slow him down. He responded by rearing up on his hind legs in “Hi-Yo Silver” style, then swung his head around to the left, hitting me hard on my forehead with the side of his face, nearly knocking me from the saddle. However, I was able to hold on and continued my ride on this now uncontrollable steed. The horse decided he wanted to run in the ditch next to the barbed wire fence with the threatening iron impalement stakes, so he exited the roadway for the undulating terrain of the grassy ditch. Other riders were doing the same, but by choice or otherwise, I don’t know.

As if on some cue, the whole 800 horse herd suddenly started running at full gallop, on the road and in the ditches. The reason became clear when, looking left, I saw the buildings and corrals of the Big Gulch Ranch, a quarter mile down the access road at mile marker 78. The winter pasture horses and all the wranglers’ horses recognized their home and knew the end of the horse drive was in sight. There was no stopping!

As my horse made a ninety degree left turn at full gallop, I was holding on to the saddle horn with my left hand and to the back rim of my saddle with my right hand, the only way I could stay in the saddle. Then I heard a voice shouting, “Your halter rope is dragging! Your halter rope is dragging!” Due to the horse earlier trying to bend down to eat grass, the leather tie strings around the rope had come loose. This was dangerous indeed, for if the horse had stepped on the rope, it would have been a disastrous head- over-heels “wreck”.

I pulled back on the reins and slowed the horse down enough for someone (don’t know who) was able to grab the rope and hand it to me. I wrapped the rope around the saddle horn. But in doing so, at full gallop, I lost control of the reins. Thankfully, the reins were tied in a knot near the ends, so they remained around the horse’ neck. But the left rein was on the horse’ neck and the right rein was dangerously dangling in a loop near his right hoof. At full gallop, as I retrieved the reins and got them centered, the halter lead rope again fell to the ground. Again, someone grabbed the rope and handed it to me. This time I wrapped it firmly around the saddle horn. I held on to the reins, the rope and the saddle horn as tight as I could with my left hand, while holding onto the back of my saddle with my right hand. This had literally become “the ride of my life!”

With clouds of dust and the awesome sound of nearly a thousand head of horses running at full speed, I followed the herd on the last leg of the drive. Still in the left side ditch of the access road to the ranch, looming before me was a big drainage culvert jutting out from under the dirt road. There were two ways for the horse to go, jumping over the drainage ditch, or sprinting up onto the road. I secured my grip with my white- knuckled fingers inside my gloves, ready for the big jump to clear the drainage ditch.

Instead, at the last moment, my horse decided to exit the ditch and climb up onto the road. Barely clearing the culvert, we galloped up the rise and joined the other riders in the dust cloud behind the herd. By this time, most of the herd had gone through the gate, into the big corral of the ranch. Thankfully, all the horses had to slow down to a posting trot, then to a walk. The 40th annual Great American Horse Drive was over!



My wife Lydia, daughter Stephanie, grandson Brogan and son-in-law Doyle Leach drove over from Longmont for the action on Saturday and Sunday. Here they are at the Big Gulch Ranch in their “not exactly cowboy” duds. They tried to hide their city slicker image with hats bought from a store in Steamboat Springs.



This is “THE GATE” of the Gate-to-Gate “Great American Horse Drive”. After riding through this Sombrero Ranches Big Gulch gate, I gladly un-saddled, un-bridled and un-halterd my fiery red prancing quarterhorse and bid him adios as he joined the rest of his “pasture buddies”, to be transported to one of the many Sombrero Ranches stables. I’m sure he will be settled down into a gentle riding horse for tourists. As for me, I will always remember The Last Mile and what a ride it was!



Sunday May 6, 2012. The last horse passed through the finish gate of the Big Gulch Ranch around 4:00 PM. With all the day's dust still covering us, we were presented our "Gate-to-Gate" trophy belt buckle. Here, my team leaders, **Christy Cramer** and **Johnny Garcia** did the honors. My dusty saddle-horn saddle-bags and hat are trophies too.

This Old Saddle Of Mine (Larry W. Jones 11/29/2011)
(song#6440)

It's served as a pillow for my tired, weary head
Though I would have preferred a real pillow instead
It's been a chair when I had hardly time to dine
It's put up with the grind, this old saddle of mine

This old saddle of mine doesn't have fancy style
But it's been my companion for many a mile
Yes, it has fought my fears and caught my salty tears
And served as gear for songs, this old saddle of mine

(instrumental)

This old saddle of mine doesn't have fancy style
But it's been my companion for many a mile
Yes, it has fought my fears and caught my salty tears
And served as gear for songs, this old saddle of mine

Now, city folks who just don't know
Ask me if I've been in the saddle all my days
And I tell them it ain't for show
This old saddle of mine has seen my cowboy ways

From Texas to Wyoming and Calgary's pines
I've carried it, it's carried me, this old saddle of mine

This old saddle of mine



Sombrero Ranches head wrangler Ed Pinkard – Airborne!

The Alleyway, where horses are driven from the pasture to be placed in pens on the left and right for sorting. This is where we started the day by tying, brushing, saddling and reining our horse.





“Pony him around” was a term heard often, referring to leading a half-wild horse around by the halter rope until he settled down. Then an experienced wrangler would do a “re-ride” after saddling the horse before the guest wrangler would climb aboard. My big Belgian draft horse did not need this but the fiery red quarterhorse did. During Sunday’s final drive, I found myself saddled in a rodeo “re-ride” mode more than once.



Riding flank or riding drag in the ditches was more challenging than up on the dirt roads or pavement. The ground was uneven and soft, there were water ponds to go around, depressions and ditches to jump, and trash of every sort to avoid, such as car bumpers and other hazards such as barb wire.

The Big Gulch Ranch is a working horse ranch. Here, Ed Pinkard fits new shoes after removing the old shoes, cleaning, trimming and filing the hoof. Imagine removing more than a thousand sets of shoes



before winter pasture at all the Sombrero stables and fitting that many again during the month of May before the horses are sent out to the various stables.



This photo was taken during the lunch break on Sunday. The herd had been driven off the road onto a wide shoulder area. The paid wranglers guarded the herd while the guest wranglers ate lunch. Then we swapped places and guarded the herd while the Sombrero wranglers ate their lunch. The herd was strung out close to a mile.

Ed Pinkard's farrier tool box. A farrier is a specialist in equine hoof care, including the trimming and balancing of horses' hooves and the placing of shoes on their hooves, if necessary. A farrier combines some blacksmith's skills with some veterinarian's skills (knowledge of the anatomy and physiology of the lower limb) to care for horses' feet.





Lead wranglers. They set the pace for the whole herd.

Lonesome Buckaroo (Larry W. Jones 10/24/2011) (song#6337)

The prairie moon tonight is bestowing
 Golden beams in a night of velvet blue
 As if the man in the moon is knowing
 Heartfelt dreams of a lonesome buckaroo

Deep in the night the moon keeps on shining
 On a cowboy ridin' herd until dawn
 Deep in his heart he feels a strong pining
 For love right along with his night herd song

In the night the cowboy sings lonesome songs
 Only the wind carries his heartfelt tune
 Merry they could be but now they belong
 To a lonesome buckaroo and the moon

(instrumental)

Deep in the night the moon keeps on shining
 On a cowboy ridin' herd until dawn
 Deep in his heart he feels a strong pining
 For love right along with his night herd song

In the night the cowboy sings lonesome songs
 Only the wind carries his heartfelt tune
 Merry they could be but now they belong
 To a lonesome buckaroo and the moon

Merry they could be but now they belong
 To a lonesome buckaroo and the moon



This was one watering hole we used for the horses during Sunday's drive. When astride our own mounts, we had to be aware of any indication that our horse wanted to lie down in the water. When standing in water, if a horse begins to paw and splash the water with one of his front hooves, it indicates his desire to lie down and roll in the water. To prevent this, the reins had to be pulled to lift his head and keep him moving.

Spring Branding (Larry W. Jones 12/19/2011) (song#6482)

Now, Winter's done and Spring roundup's begun
 All the new dogies have to be branded
 Keep them ashes stirred cause the whole dern herd
 Is in the corral with fence expanded

Keep that brand red hot, tie their legs with knots
 Boys, keep that brand red hot for Spring branding
 Keep that brand red hot, boys Keep that brand red hot
 Tie their legs with knots, boys Keep that brand red hot

When the last cow bawls and the Cookie calls
 To the kettle and coffee we're runnin'
 If Cookie's apple pie is too dern dry
 For his Chinese hide we'll all be gunnin'

Tie his legs with knots, boys Keep that brand red hot
 Keep that brand red hot, boys Keep that brand red hot
 Tie their legs with knots, boys Keep that brand red hot

When we've had our sup and the moon comes up
 The boys 'n me'll be toward town ridin'
 It'll be bottoms up from an old tin cup
 And in the town jail we might be hidin'

Tie their legs with knots, boys Keep that brand red hot
 Keep that brand red hot, boys Keep that brand red hot
 Tie their legs with knots, boys Keep that brand red hot

When tomorrow comes boss'll bail us out
 He'll toss us all in the corral, no doubt
 But then he'll say, I remember the day
 Boys, just like you, I too was young and stout

Tie their legs with knots, boys Keep that brand red hot
 Keep that brand red hot, boys Keep that brand red hot
 Tie their legs with knots, boys Keep that brand red hot

I've got his legs tied cowboy Now brand 'im while it's red hot



Newlyweds **Jason and Jordan Norman**. Jason works for Sombrero Ranches as a wrangler at the Estes Park stables. Jordan Kameleokalani is from the island of Maui where she worked at a Paniolo (Hawaiian Cowboy) stable.

She knows several of the island entertainers which I have contacts with through my “Island Song Lyrics”, such as George Kahumoku Jr, Ledward Kaapana, Kenneth Makuakane and others.



A wrangler taking a break during a lunch stop. We rested where and when we could, but that wasn't very often, and not for very long either. The horses need a rest period as well. When we tied their halter ropes to the fences, the saddle cinch was loosened so they could breathe easier. The saddle blanket cushioned the horse from the saddle and rider, but it got hot, and the horses were glad to have the saddle removed.

I took this short break in a mesquite grove during lunch break on the first day of the horse drive, Saturday May 5th. I looked around for rattlesnakes first!





Ed Pinkard had finished shoeing the front hooves and was now working on the back hooves. The horse became uncooperative. After several attempts, Ed went to his farrier equipment trailer and brought out this stick called a “Twitch”. It has a small chain at the end which is placed around part of the horse’s upper lip and then the stick is twisted to pull the lip as shown.

This does not hurt the horse. A “Twitch” is routinely used by veterinarians when inspecting the teeth and other care being given. It is thought that this practice causes the release of endorphins in the horse’s brain that results in a calming of the horse.

Ed was now able to install the rear shoes with no objection from the horse. This was just one of many lessons a greenhorn wrangler learns when at a working ranch.

The experiences which I became part of while participating in the Great American Horse Drive engendered in me a deep respect for the hard but rewarding life that a real cowboy lives. It could not be gained from reading a book, and this book only scratches the surface of lessons to be learned.



We had a “chaps and chinks” branding session on Friday evening. My pair of chinks received the two Sombrero Ranches brands, “Sombrero Hat” and the “Box-L”. My personal brand, registered in Harris County Texas is the “Rocking LWJ”. Here, Donald Broom is applying the hot iron on the left leg after placing the right leg brand upside down.

The chuckwagon was invented by **Charles (Chuck) Goodnight** in the panhandle of Texas. He was also a Texas Ranger. He and **Oliver Loving** blazed the Goodnight-Loving cattle trail from west Texas to Wyoming. The movie, **Lonesome Dove**, was based on their third



cattle drive, including Charles bringing the body of his friend Oliver Loving back to Texas for burial. This particular chuckwagon was part of the scenery at the Big Gulch Ranch, next to the covered wagon where we were awarded the Gate-to-Gate trophy belt buckles.



(Photo credit: **Ping-Tzu**) Riding flank along Colorado Hwy 40 on Sunday May 6th. This photo shows how strung-out the herd could and did become, at times, a mile long. Note the horses running right alongside the roadway as well as far up the hill.

There were times when a hundred head of horses would get past our wrangler line and run to the opposite side of the road, into the ditch, and head back against the flow. That's when cowboys with bullwhips chased after them, cracking the whips like bolts of thunder above the heads of the horses until they got the leading horses turned around. Then the escapees had to be driven back across the road to rejoin the rest of the herd.

Before the day ended, my vocal cords were strained and hoarse from all the yelling and whooping, trying to keep the herd moving forward together as much as possible. It was a team effort and each wrangler had to do his or her part quickly as events unfolded.

My horsemanship instructor, Christy Cramer, is on the gray horse at left of this photo.



Butts ‘n Boots. These cowgirls performed the anti-bacterial injections into the neck of the doggies at their branding.

Map of the 50,000 acre **Browns Park** and 20,000 acre **Big Gulch Ranch**.



Cowboys Way (Larry W. Jones 01/03/2011) (song#6516)

To a cowpoke's ear, the bawl of a steer
Is a melody of the plains
And when gray coyotes make their howling notes
To him it's just a grateful strain

And his cowboy song as he rides along
Is all about his pretty gal
With her golden hair she'll be waiting there
By the gate of the old corral

For a king's gold crown in a big old town
He would turn down and never change
For his life is free on the wide prairie
Riding out on the western range

His eyes are open to everything there
But there's nothing to make him fret
And if now and then his soul has a care
It will bring him no cold regret

(instrumental)

The loud pounding beat of his pony's feet
On the sod as he rides along
Is in harmony with the melody
Of his light hearted cowboy song

He still rides the way as in yesterday
With a big holler and a hoot
With a tightened cinch that won't give an inch
When he digs with a roweled boot

The skies may turn grey and make cowboys pray
And the wind may blow cold and moan
But a cowboy's way is his only way
The saddle is a cowboy's throne

So, saddle up boys for the ride today
Just look at those big western skies
And we'll know the joys of a cowboy's way
For I can see it in your eyes

About the Author

Larry W Jones is a songwriter, having penned over 7,700 song lyrics. Published in 22 volumes of island themed, country, cowboy, western and bluegrass songs. The entire assemblage is the world's largest collection of lyrics written by an individual songwriter.

As a wrangler on the “Great American Horse Drive”, at age 68, he assisted in driving 800 half-wild horses 62 miles in two days, from Winter pasture grounds in far NW Colorado to the Big Gulch Ranch outside of Craig Colorado.

His book, “The Oldest Greenhorn”, chronicles the adventures and perils in earning the “Gate-to-Gate” trophy belt buckle the hard way.



Other books by Larry W Jones:

A Squirrel Named Julie and The Fox Ridge Fox
The Painting Of A Dream
The Boy With Green Thumbs and The Wild Tree Man
Red Cloud – Chief Of the Sioux
Spotted Tail – The Orphan Negotiator
Little Crow – The Fur Trapper's Patron
Chief Gall – The Strategist
Crazy Horse – The Vision Quest Warrior
Sitting Bull - The Powder River Power
Rain-In-The-Face – The Setting Sun Brave
Two Strike – The Lakota Club Fighter
Chief American Horse – The Oglala Councilor
Chief Dull Knife – The Sharp-Witted Cheyenne
Chief Joseph – Retreat From Grande Ronde
The Oregon Trail Orphans
Kids In Bloom Volume 1
Kids In Bloom Volume 2
Kids Animal Pals Volume 1
Kids Animal Pals Volume 2
Bird Kids Volume 1
Bird Kids Volume 2
Garden Kids Volume 1
Garden Kids Volume 2
Folklore Of Jackson Hole
Henny Penny Meets Chicken Little
Delightful Stories For Children
The 1825 Voyage Of HMS Blonde
Illustrated Stories For Young Children
Sea Sagas – Perilous Voyages
Songbirds And Their Stories
The Jungle Book – Mowgli's Brothers
The Jungle Book – Kaa's Hunting
The Jungle Book – Tiger! Tiger!
The Jungle Book – The White Seal
The Jungle Book – Rikki-Tikki-Tavi
The Jungle Book – Toomai of the Elephants
The Jungle Book – Her Majesty's Servants
All his publications are available on [Lulu.com](https://www.lulu.com)